

MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS

Key Issues the Committee will Develop Policy Recommendations to Address Include:

1. **Natural processes have been disrupted in Oregon forests. Problems are most extreme in the dry forest types where unprecedented landscape scale forest health problems are resulting in the loss of key ecological components. Hydrologic regimes have been altered and conditions may not protect beneficial uses like water quantity and quality. Climate change is and will continue to tax the resiliency of federal forestlands and identifying the impacts is challenging. An integrated approach to forest restoration and fuels management that considers historic conditions, natural hydrology and adequate streamflows, fish and wildlife conservation, natural fire intervals, and silvicultural techniques is necessary to achieve long term management goals.**

Natural processes on Oregon's federal forests have been modified by a number of factors. For example, decades of fire suppression and silvicultural practices on some federal forestlands have modified fire regimes and behavior producing changes in vegetative conditions – including changes in species composition, increased stand density, and a reduction in the large tree component – ultimately reducing forest resiliency and impacting aquatic habitat. Growth has dramatically exceeded removals on federal lands during the past decade causing a build up of fiber across the landscape. The results have been high tree mortality and fuels build-ups due to insects, disease and invasive species, and large un-natural wildfires resulting in impacts to wildlife habitat, water quality, private timber investments, structures in the wildland-urban interface, and public impacts from smoke. Without an increase in active management¹ these conditions are expected to continue.

Water quantity and quality are inseparable issues. Adequate streamflows and natural hydrology help maintain high water quality in Oregon's rivers and streams. Water quality and quantity issues are linked to changes in land uses, increasing intensities of land management, growing demand for water, and uncertainty about the role climate change will play in long term supply. In the Pacific Northwest, watershed health also is directly related to healthy populations of migratory salmon. Many measures of ecosystem performance, water quality, and watershed health have been linked to salmonid populations.

Climate change may be affecting forest and hydrological conditions in Oregon. If

¹ “Active management” means the application of practices through planning and design, over time and across the landscape, to achieve site-specific forest resource goals. Active management uses an integrated, science-based approach that promotes the compatibility of most forest uses and resources over time and across the landscape. “Active management” should not be equated with “intensive timber management. Instead, it refers to taking proactive steps to achieve whatever management objectives have been established for a forest site. [Based on the *Forestry Program for Oregon* and OAR 629-035-000 (1).]

trends continue, changes from dry temperate forests to grasslands, moist forests to dry woodlands, and high-severity fires may eliminate entire forest types. This type of change would increase risks of species extinction, and reduce economic and social values derived from the forest. Management decisions will determine if federal forests will serve as net carbon sinks or carbon sources.

2. Reduced timber harvest from federal forestlands has resulted in diminished forest industry infrastructure with unintended economic and social losses to rural communities.

Oregon lacks a predictable federal timber sale program, and the harvest goals in the federal land management plans have not been achieved. The resulting 80 percent reduction in federal timber harvests in the last 20 years has contributed to mill closures, job losses, and both economic and social hardship in many rural communities. Oregon is losing the local capacity and markets needed to support a viable forest products industry and the workforce needed to provide forest protection and restoration services. Some sawmills in western Oregon are currently being supported by an unsustainable supply of sawlogs imported from Washington, while eastern Oregon industry is in rapid decline and close to losing infrastructure completely. Reduction in federal timber harvests, and declining log markets, may increase development on private forestlands and contribute to forestland conversion.

Oregon's forests are important to the global environment, economy, and society. Both the federal government and Oregonians have not fully considered the impact of their decisions regarding federal land management at local, state, national, and international levels. As a result, environmental challenges and economic opportunities have been exported to other nations.

3. The desired amount of older forests on federal forestlands needs to be established and protected as a component of sustainable forest management. Habitat types should provide for wildlife diversity. A well-balanced program of forest management activities is necessary to maintain the mix of successional stages and vegetation conditions that provides for the full diversity of habitats and species.

Old growth forests are characterized by structural conditions, ecological processes, and micro-environments that may require very long periods to develop. Their importance in wildlife conservation derives from the diverse and specialized habitat conditions provided, dependence of many wildlife species on these habitats, and the fact that old growth forests are depleted. Others recognize the aesthetic value of "cathedral-like" old growth stands or the existence value of extremely old trees.

Most old growth forests occur on federal lands. Agencies have implemented restoration programs to accelerate the development of stands with old growth habitat characteristics; however, many decades will be required to reverse the depleted status. Conversely, reduced timber harvesting on federal lands is likely to lower the representation of early successional stages in some forest types in the future.

Oregon lacks a comprehensive policy to ensure that biological diversity goals are being met through the combined management objectives of Oregon's public and private landowners. Desired habitat conditions such as tree species composition, age class distribution, stand density and structure, snags and downed wood, and the size, shape, and juxtaposition of forest stands is essential for creating short- and long-term conditions to sustain populations and communities of wildlife. Conservation actions focused on the restoration and maintenance of natural habitats are likely to benefit a wider range of organisms than conservation actions developed for a single species. It is best to maintain diverse and healthy wildlife communities.

4. Federal, state, local, and tribal governments lack an effective process to coordinate policy decisions and achieve landscape scale objectives.

The Federal land management agencies are required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Forest Management Act to coordinate their activities with and/or to be consistent with state and local government planning activities. Historically there has been little if any coordination or consistency in Federal land management decisions other than to request comments from the agencies during the public comment period. As a result the concerns of the local governments in the communities that are most affected by the management of Federal forests have been afforded the same status of comments originating from communities far removed from the Federal forest. County and City elected officials' concerns relative to forest health, public safety, economic and other matters of county or city concern are therefore not afforded the consistency or coordination required by Federal land management statutes or State law. The discretionary actions relating to Federal lands must be fully coordinated between Federal, state and local governments through more extensive and true partnership relationship.

5. Funding is not adequate or appropriately allocated to achieve land management objectives on federal lands. A stable funding source is necessary to achieve long-term management goals.

There is a severe lack of funding for the federal land management agencies. Funding is insufficient to provide basic stewardship of the land and its resources, and to offer a high level of environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits. Declining budgets limit the agencies ability to maintain staffing levels of the past, resulting fewer employees to accomplish objectives. For example: an increase in fire suppression funding has come at the expense of preparedness, fuel reduction and all non-fire programs. The proportion of fire suppression funds in the Forest Service budget was 13% in 1991; it is 45% in 2007, while the total budget has decreased. This results in insufficient funding for environmental assessment and monitoring of aquatic ecosystems, wildlife habitat restoration, invasive species management, range management, facilities and access maintenance, road maintenance and decommissioning and recreation management.

**Overarching Problems the Committee will use to Develop Policy Recommendations
Include:**

1. The legal framework, court decisions, and shifting legal landscape governing federal forestlands contains multiple goals complicating the balancing of social, economic and environmental values.
2. Changing public values, lack of clear widely accepted goals, repeated court challenges, and the inability to implement decisions have led to a lack of trust and confidence in federal land management decisions.